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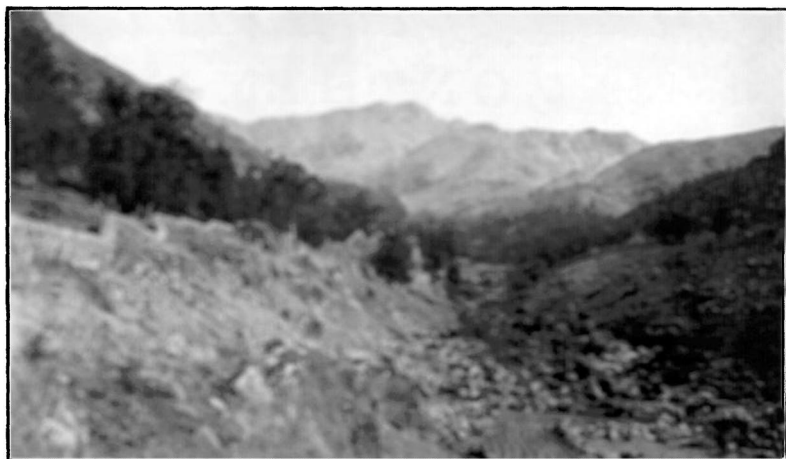
THE OLDEST PLACE OF WORSHIP IN THE WORLD¹

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TAI Shan in central Shantung is the most noteworthy of the five sacred mountains of China and is the oldest place of uninterrupted worship in the world. In the remotest mythical period kings made regular sacrifices on the mountain top, the nearest approach to heaven known to them, and this practice continued into the eleventh century of the Christian Era. To-day a temple marks this primeval altar, and the infrequent foreigner may carelessly stand on the rocks where Yao and Shun, heroes of China's "Golden Age," made their offering to the Spirit of Heaven. In the earliest mention of the mountain, about 2,000 B.C., and probably long after it had become an object of religious regard, we find the worship described as being, not of the mountain, nor of a spirit abiding there, but of one God, a dweller in heaven. Yet from time immemorial the people have personified the mountain or imagined that it has a soul, or is inhabited by a spirit, which is alluded to as the genius of the mountain. This has been given names, which have changed in different epochs. In 1369 the Buddhist founder of the Ming Dynasty decreed that worship should be offered to Tung Yo T'ai Shan. When Taoist influence becomes predominant, Tai Shan has a birthday, and is the abode of a multitude of spirits, and has to do with the birth, death, adversity and prosperity of mortals, while the little hill of Kao Li at its foot is closely associated with the judgment of human souls after death. In the sixth, seventh, tenth and twelfth centuries the Buddhists were in control, but now their presence is scarcely noticeable. The temples have fallen into the hands of illiterate Taoist priests who seem to foster the worship of the "Lady of Tai Shan" rather than of the mountain itself. The legends of the "Jade Lady," as she was at first called, are very indefinite. She has been seen twice, first in 2600 B.C., and again about A.D. 65, as one of seven women, dressed in feathers and crowned with clouds. A more popular tale identifies her with a girl named Yu Yeh, born near Tai Shan in the year 143 B.C., who at a tender age went to live in a cave on the mountain, hoping to

¹ Photographs by the author.



TAI SHAN (GREAT MOUNTAIN) FROM NEAR THE BEGINNING OF THE PILGRIMS' WAY, which is shown on the left. The "Eighteen Flights" leading to the Heaven Gate can be seen below the notch some distance to the left of the peak. Note the gardens in the ravine.

become a fairy. After three years she is said to have attained her object. About 1008 a marble statue of the Lady was found in the Pool of the Jade Lady on the mountain-top, and this discovery seems to be responsible for her present popularity. The chapel in which this statue was placed preceded the present Lady Temple, the chief shrine at the summit. Aside from its local features, the religious fortunes of the mountain have followed those of China as a whole.

The annual pilgrimage is the most characteristic feature of the worship. The shrines are thronged with pilgrims during the first three or four months of the year. In former times they attended in hundreds of thousands, even millions, from all over the empire, but now the numbers have greatly fallen off and few come from beyond the province. The pilgrimage is the occasion of a fair in the walled town of Tai An at the south base of the mountain. Here the large Lady Temple is filled with shops of all sorts, and in the open spaces outside are refreshment venders, quacks, peep-shows, minstrels, and story-tellers. The pilgrims travel very frequently in clubs. Each member contributes a monthly subscription to the promoters until a sufficient sum has been collected. Then in the first moon (February) they set out, usually afoot, the leader carrying a flag with the name of their town and other items written upon it, while the other members often wear a red or yellow girdle. Their money is spent first on religious duties, secondly on food, fairs, gambling, and lastly in some cases on erecting a stone tablet to commemorate the names and subscriptions of the participants.

Prior to the completion of the Tienstsin-Pukow railroad it was diffi-



TAI SHAN FROM BEYOND THE HALF-WAY STATION; Heaven Gate and the steps leading to it on the left. The two conspicuous squares on the face of the cliff are inscriptions left by former pilgrims. Compare with neighboring pine tree. In the foreground the Pilgrims' Way is on the right.

cult for a foreigner to reach Tai Shan. Now the journey is a long day by train from Tientsin to a small station called Taianfu, two miles west of the walled town of Tai An, which crouches at the south base of the mountain, and from which the remarkable Pilgrims' Way sets out. Be it remembered the railroad has not brought the English language, nor the foreign hotel. Except for the trains, this part of the ancient kingdom of Lu has changed little since the days of Confucius.²

We quitted Taianfu in the chill of an October dawn, borne in mountain chairs by sturdy Shantung men. There were four of these chairs,³ each carried by two men, while four extra bearers followed the caravan to relieve the others. We made a brave showing as the coolies pattered over the rough plain toward approaching day. Tai Shan looked all of its 5,000 feet. Its gaunt head and shoulders were chang-

² Without the aid of Mr. P. H. Henry Sze of the Tientsin-Pukow railroad, who generously acted as cicerone and supplied a comfortable private car, two American wanderers would never have beheld the cliffs of gray Tai Shan. The language alone is a sufficient barrier to a foreigner, while it requires a considerable outfit to utilize a Chinese native inn. To the Honorable Alfred Sze I am equally indebted for having suggested the pilgrimage, and for having aided in its accomplishment.

³ These chairs consist of a square frame with a few cords stretched over it for seat, and fitted with a foot board and a low back. Two curved carrying poles are fixed to the frame with iron clamps, and are slung by long leather straps and cords over the shoulders of the bearers, who often hold the ends of the poles in their hands. In going up or down the steep mountain path, or sometimes also on level ground, the bearers walk abreast, with the occupant facing sideways between them. A third man may aid the others.



THE UPPER PART OF THE PILGRIMS' WAY, showing the Eighteen Flights and the South Gate of Heaven. The road here follows the margin of a dry torrent bed. Note the people on the road.

ing to a rosy image of the erstwhile uncompromising crags, while broad masses of shadow still clung to its uncertain boulder-strewn flanks and ravines. Greeted by dogs, we flitted past Tai An, up the broad Pilgrims' Way where so many of the lowly and great of China had preceded us. This road, ten feet in width, paved with rock and often bordered by substantial walls, clambers up ravines, over ornate bridges, meanders through venerable cypress groves,⁴ jumps over ledges in

⁴ Although called cypresses these trees are really large *Thuja orientalis*.



THE TAI SHAN CHAIR.

flights of steps and with a trajectory like that of a sky-rocket scales the last steep gorge and disappears through the South Gate of Heaven, nearly five miles from Tai An.

With the coming of the sun a multitude of beggars crept from near-by hamlets and demanded coppers in whining tones. Above a zone of small temples, overshadowed by ash-like huai trees, we came upon huge boulders underneath which had been constructed little cells



"THE BEARERS STOPPED FOR BREAKFAST AT A SORT OF LITTLE HALF-WAY STATION, where over acrid fires of cow-dung they brewed tea and devoured huge cakes resembling hardtacks, twenty inches in diameter."



THE SOUTH GATE OF HEAVEN (NAN T'IENT MEN). This great gate marks the entrance to the sacred precincts of the summit and is at the top of the Shih Pa Pan or Eighteen Flights. Beyond it are all the temples of the mountain-top, and a small village of thatched stone huts which line a continuation of the Way, leading to the Lady Temple. Note the chain on the left placed there to aid weary pilgrims.

in which beggars or perhaps holy folk live when the way is thronged with devotees. On the stony sides of the ravine were little garden patches, with here and there a mud-and-stone walled house. Magpies called from the cypress-clad slopes, and an occasional Chinese blue-pie stopped on a wall to inspect us. Among the numerous honorary gateways or pailows, we passed under one characteristically Chinese, for growing out of the front were two fairly large cypresses. Weeds,



THE PILGRIMS' WAY, FROM THE GATE OF HEAVEN. Looking down the Eighteen Flights, over spurs of Tai Shan. This is the steepest part of the "road," which for many hundreds of feet is a huge flight of stone steps. If one holds the picture horizontally directly below the eyes, the effect of steepness is partly gained.

bushes, and even trees adorn nearly every edifice of sanctity, as well as others of no pretensions.

The bearers stopped for breakfast at a sort of little half-way station, where over acrid fires of dry, peaty, cow-dung they brewed tea in pewter-bound, globular pots of unglazed earthenware, once white but now a meerschaum brown from long use. Fortified with this, they devoured huge cakes resembling hardtacks, twenty inches in diameter. Then



THE TEMPLE OF THE MOUNTAIN LADY. "At the end of a meandering street skirting the verge of some cliffs is the principal Lady Temple, built of stone covered with reddish plaster and roofed with yellow and gray tiles (sometimes of brass or iron)." The steps lead to the west gate (1661). The second roof to the left, that of the Gate Hall, is covered with iron tiles. The main temple is the last large building of this group, to the left. It is roofed with brass or copper tiles. Of the three temples in the upper left corner, the lowest is dedicated to Confucius. Note the thatch held down by sticks and stones.

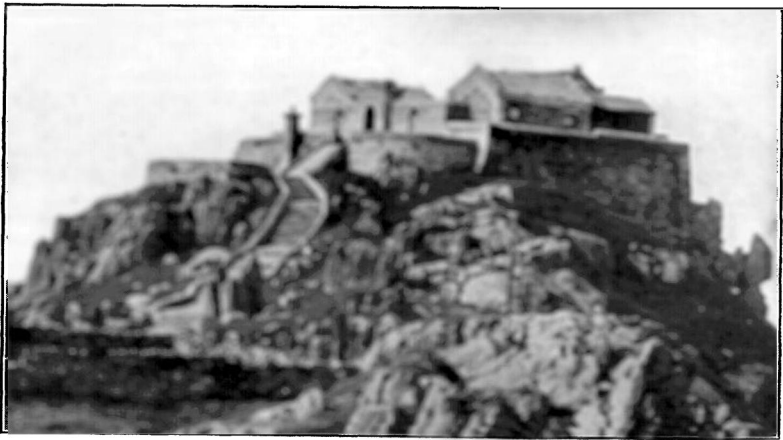
each drew from a tube at his belt a little pipe which he deftly lit with flint and steel. The flint and tinder (soft Chinese paper rolled into a cylinder and charred at the end) were kept in a small ornamented wallet, the lower side of which had a piece of steel the whole length like the runner of a skate.

On either side of the Pilgrims' Way, deeply chiseled in the rock, are numerous inscriptions, some gigantic in size. They record the visits and thoughts of pilgrims of note. Some are poems, and of many the ideographs are archaic, perhaps antedating the present road itself.

It is pretty certain that the Way follows the course of an extremely ancient trail, yet who built it, or when, is not definitely known. It has been called the P'an Tao or P'an Lu and a book of the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.—A.D. 220) says: "The P'an Tao goes winding upward with over fifty stages (p'an) and the distance from the foot to the ancient altar is 40 li." At that time the great final ascent to the Tien Men, or Heaven Gate, evidently existed. It was called Huan Tao and pilgrims were aided in their climb by ropes. Now, cascading down a wild ravine for many hundreds of feet from the mouth of the Tien Men is the noble Shih Pa Pan (or Eighteen Flights) flanked for the last hundred feet by heavy iron chains. Those who are content to forego the exhilaration of a walk up Tai Shan are at least willing to forsake the mountain chairs on the Shih Pa Pan. Yet the coolies are said never to miss their footing.

Scattered over the bleak mountain-top at several different levels are over half a dozen groups of temples of rather conventional Chinese pattern. The site of the ancient altar on the topmost peak is occupied by a small temple to Yu Huang, a Taoist God, dating from the middle ages. The roof is protected by heavy iron tiles resembling those of clay. The ground is classic, for here in China's Golden Age were offered sacrifices to Heaven, and here many of the great scholars and statesmen of each succeeding dynasty were drawn by reverent curiosity. Confucius climbed Tai Shan and thought the empire small. Beside the steps leading to this altar is the Wu-tsu-pei, or Uninscribed Monument, a granite obelisk fifteen feet high, set up according to tradition by Ch'in Shih H'uang in the third century before Christ. On this part of the mountain are numerous inscriptions and monuments left by pilgrims. A rock called T'an Hai Shih, upon which people stand to watch the sun rise "from the sea," is not far from a cliff, whence numerous fanatics have plunged, hoping to save by their own death the life of a dying relative. A quiet, deserted-looking temple contains the sleeping image of the Mountain Lady, a figure which is dressed and undressed, put to bed and got up like a doll. Another temple partly hides a colossal monument in the form of an inscribed tablet cut in the face of a cliff. It is thirty feet high and sixteen feet wide. The characters were chiseled in 726 A.D. but are still clear after twelve centuries' exposure to the elements.

Below these temples and at the end of a meandering street skirting the verge of some cliffs is the Pi Hsia Ts'u or principal Lady Temple, built



THE TEMPLES SURROUNDING THE ANCIENT ALTAR ON THE SUMMIT OF TAI SHAN, dedicated to Yu Huang and dating from the middle ages. The altar is a knob of bare rock surrounded by a stone fence in a central courtyard. The "Uninscribed Monument" is seen beside the steps. It was erected in the third century before Christ.



THE LADY TEMPLE. A portion of the front, and the main court. In the huge incense-burner in the foreground we sacrificed a few bushels of paper temple money. Within the temple is an image of the Lady of the Mountain, along with other Taoist deities. The tiles are of copper.

of stone covered with reddish plaster and roofed with yellow and gray tiles. It is reached by flights of steps, which lead to a terrace, thence to the great Gate Hall, opening upon the main court, the north side of which is occupied by the main Hall of the temple. Within, the chief images are those of the Lady and of the deities presiding over child-birth and eyes. In this court are some old bronze incense burners, in one of which we sacrificed a quantity of temple money, purchased from a priest. This offering consisted of large disks of red and gilt paper,

somewhat resembling a Chinese kite. Properly burnt with incense it is much appreciated by the Lady of the Mountain, who has no use for the coin of the realm. In a side chapel is a very ancient stone, with traces of archaic inscriptions. It is much cracked and is propped together by stones. But in these temples, as elsewhere in China, the visitor without the language of the country is practically lost. Information from the priests is vague and unrelated. The traveler must piece together the disconnected bits by a vast amount of surmise, and restrain his curiosity until he can "read up," perhaps a year later when he reaches home.

This Pi Hsia Tz'u is the most wealthy of the shrines on Tai Shan and owes its origin to the discovery of the Lady's image in the Pool of the Jade Lady. The first temple was built in 1008. It was rebuilt on an elaborate scale in 1585, but was destroyed by fire in 1740 and reconstructed with considerable change in 1770.

Bordering the road which winds around the south face of the mountain from the Heaven Gate to the Lady Temple are picturesque stone huts, the roof thatch bound tight against the winter winds by strips of cane or bamboo. On the opposite side of the way, next to the wall above the bluffs, are massive stone tables between stone trenches, the tables marked into squares for some game like chess. Within, the cottages are smoked to a shiny blackness by the dung fires and streamers of soot are pendant from the dusky region of the thatch. They are occupied mostly by old people, two of whom hospitably gave me hot tea and took a childish delight in my interest in their simple belongings. The fire is made in a raised stone hearth, in the top of which are several apertures for the accommodation of iron saucepans and pewter kettles. The water flasks, lamps, dippers, and tea-pots are all of excellent design. The tea-pots are of earthenware, with pewter handle and spout, and stained a rich brown by long use. Silver would not tempt the old man shown holding temple money to part with his, for he told Mr. Sze it had been in the family for five generations and was very precious to him. The interiors are all very simple. Besides the raised hearth, there is a large earthenware water jar near the door, sometimes a rude table, and at one or both ends of the room a broad raised platform of coarse matting or basket-work which serves as a bed and a settee. When the door is closed there is little light. These dwellers within Heaven's Gate lead a life primitive in the extreme, and the rigors of winter must be severe on the old folks, unless perchance they all migrate to the plains.

Finally, what is Taoism? It is commonly supposed to be the philosophy of Lao-tsze who, between 500 and 600 B.C., wrote the Tao Teh King. In practice it is no such thing. Lao-tsze taught the Tao, or the "Way," concerning himself, as did Confucius, his contemporary, with ethical principles, the conduct of the individual and of society, and not at all with religion. The Tao was "the simplicity of spontaneity,



ONE OF THE NUMEROUS INSCRIBED ROCKS ON THE TOP OF TAI SHAN.

action without motive, free from all selfish purpose resting in nothing but its own accomplishment." This is found in the phenomena of the material world.

All things spring up without a word spoken, and grow without a claim for their production. They go through their processes without any display of pride in them; and the results are realized without any assumption of ownership. It is to the absence of such assumption that the results and their processes do not disappear (Chap. II.).

He applied this principle to the government of society and the individual. His teaching reaches its highest levels in the following:



DWELLINGS WITHIN THE GATE OF HEAVEN. "Bordering the road which winds around the south face of the mountain from the Heaven Gate to the Lady Temple are picturesque stone huts, the roof thatch bound tight against the winter winds by strips of cane or bamboo." This village is called the T'ien Chieh, and the picture is from the foot of the steps leading to the Lady Temple.

It is the way of Tao not to act from any personal motive, to conduct affairs without feeling the trouble of them, to taste without being aware of the flavor, to account the great as the small and the small as the great, to recompense injury with kindness.

There is scarcely a word of Lao-tsze which savors of superstition or religion. Taoism to-day is a system of abject superstition. It did not take shape for more than 500 years after the death of Lao-tsze.



INTERIOR OF A TAI SHAN HUT. To the left is the stone stove with cooking utensils and, beyond, a table. On the right is a large water jar in front of a table set "for tea." The old men are sitting on one of the bed platforms; the photograph was taken from the other. There is a broom leaning against the stove.



OLD MAN WITH TEMPLE MONEY. This old man sells temple money to be burned at the altar of the Lady of the Mountain. It is made of red and gilt paper. Note the quilted coat and trousers and the fur cap with ear flaps.

In the first century A.D. a magician Chang Tao-ling is the chief professor and controller of this Taoism, preparing in retirement the pill which renewed his youth, supreme over all spirits, and destroying millions of demons by a stroke of his pencil.

It was not until about A.D. 70 that the system borrowed temples, monasteries, liturgies and forms of public worship from the Buddhists and set up business as a religion. After assuming the form of a religion it continued to degenerate until now it is "in reality a conglomeration of base and dangerous superstitions" fused with a system of the wildest

polytheism. Alchemy, geomancy, spiritualism and black art generally flourish under its shadow. Each of its three Holy Ones (of whom Lao-tsze is one) has the title of Tien Tsun, "The Heavenly or Honored," taken from Buddhism, and also of Shang Ti, or God, taken from the ancient religion of the country. To the myriad of other demigods and spirits are added many of merely local import, as the Lady of Tai Shan.

As one looks from Heaven's Gate, down the long Pilgrims' Way and into the golden haze that lingers over the Cradle of China, he seems to conjure up that solemn procession of people and kings of old Cathay, stretching in an unending line to the dim legendary realm of a heroic age. Dynasties have risen and died, yet the innumerable multitude with each recurring spring has been drawn hither as by a titanic lodestone. Each has had his own quest, and, doubtless, in spite of the trumpery of childish superstition, many now find solace on the mountain top. Yet while blindly following the Pilgrims' Road has not the great host wandered far from the "Way" which was blazed for them in the braver, saner days of old?